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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000160

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)
HQSHOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2029

TAGS: PREL ASEC VE

SUBJECT: STATE TV AIRS TELCON WITH POLOFF - ALLEGES PLOT

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (U) Action message -- See Para 6.

¶2. (SBU) Venezolana de Television (VTV), the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (GBRV's) free-to-air state TV station, aired on January 27 a January 9 telephone conversation between the secretary of opposition activist Enrique Mendoza and an Embassy political officer. Mendoza's secretary was following up on a January 5 lunch meeting between Mendoza and the Charge and PolCouns in which Mendoza offered to forward a copy of a poll. Alberto Nolia, host of the pro-government "Papers of Mandinga" political commentary show, used the conversation to allege that Mendoza and other opposition leaders had subordinated themselves to -- and are plotting with -- the USG.

¶3. (SBU) VTV aired the entire, albeit brief, January 9 Spanish language conversation (with subtitled text) between Mariana Barrios, the secretary of opposition activist and former Miranda Governor Enrique Mendoza, and an Embassy political officer. Barrios initiated the call and asked for PolCouns by name. Upon learning that PolCouns was out of the office, Barrio told Poloff that she wanted to pass a "confidential envelope" to the Charge and PolCouns. (Note: This was a public opinion poll that Mendoza had promised to forward to the Charge). Poloff advised Barrios to drop off the envelope with the local guards and mark it for the attention of PolCouns. Barrios called shortly before the Embassy was going to close, so Poloff also suggested she send the envelope the next business day, January 12.

¶4. (SBU) "Papers of Mandinga" host Alberto Nolia tied the conversation to an apocryphal Puerto Rico meeting between some opposition leaders and the Charge. During an extended monologue in which the names of the Charge and PolCouns appear in the subtitles, Nolia stated the following:

-- "What the hell kind of confidential report is Enrique Mendoza and the rest of the opposition passing to the U.S. Embassy?"

-- "It's commonly known that Political Attaches are spies."

-- "They (the opposition) are prostitutes in the service of the United States."

-- "They (the opposition) charge millions of dollars for betraying their country."

-- "The regular anti-Chavista is a common Venezuelan, decent and honorable who rejects with disgust that individuals like (Globovision director) Ravell go meet with the Ambassador, with the Charge d'Affaires to receive orders and money..."

In addition, Mario Silva, host of VTV's "The Razor" attack show, sharply criticized the Charge February 3 for his solidarity visit the previous day to the Caracas synagogue

that was attacked and vandalized during a January 30-31 nighttime intrusion. Silva argued that the Charge was interfering in Venezuela's domestic affairs.

¶15. (C) Comment: GBRV officials and state media outlets frequently criticize the USG and USG officials, but the most recent broadcast of an intercepted telephone conversation with a political officer represents an escalation. Venezuelan government media is not only violating the privacy of the U.S. diplomatic mission, but deliberately misconstruing and demonizing standard U.S. diplomatic activities. In a tense local political climate, sharp government criticism has frequently spurred pro-Chavez groups to launch physical attacks on perceived "enemies," including diplomatic missions, such as the Holy See Mission in Caracas. Moreover, the GBRV broadcast a private telephone conversation of the Colombian Consul General in Maracaibo to justify expelling him in 2008. End Comment

¶16. (C) Action Request - Embassy recommends that the Department raise with the Venezuelan Charge USG concerns regarding state monitoring and state media broadcasting of conversations with U.S. diplomats. Embassy also suggests that the Department inform that Venezuelan Charge that continued incendiary state media attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Caracas are incompatible with normalization of relations. Moreover, the incendiary rhetoric could inspire violence against the Embassy or its personnel.

CAULFIELD